NAXOS

Pigs Could Fly

Songs by

Skempton, Britten, Bliss, Tavener, Rutter

and many more

The New London Children's Choir • Ronald Corp

Pigs Could Fly

Twentieth-Century Music for Children's Choir

Howard Skempton (b. 1947):	
1 Pigs could fly (Text: Skempton)	**1:18**
2 Alice is one (Skempton)	**1:08**
3 Benjamin Britten (1913-1976):	
Corpus Christi Carol (Anon. 15th century)	**2:29**
4 Ronald Corp (b. 1951): Give to my eyes, Lord (Colin Coppen)	**3:52**
Richard Rodney Bennett (b. 1936): The Aviary	**8:35**
5 The Bird's Lament (John Clare)	**2:21**
6 The Owl (Alfred Tennyson)	**1:14**
7 The Early Nightingale (Clare)	**2:15**
8 The Widow Bird (Percy Bysshe Shelley)	**1:35**
9 The Lark (Samuel Coleridge)	**1:10**
10 John Tavener (b. 1944): Notre Père (The Lord's Prayer)	**2:27**
11 Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958):	
Dirge for Fidele (William Shakespeare)	**2:56**
12 Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934):	
Shepherds of Hoy (George MacKay Brown)	**2:07**
13 Bob Chilcott (b. 1955):	
The lily and the rose (16th century English)	**3:28**
14 Benjamin Britten:	
May (Anon.)	**1:21**

Ronald Corp: Flower Songs (Robert Herrick)	**5:57**
15 **To Daffodils**	**1:46**
16 **To Violets**	**0:50**
17 **The Primrose**	**1:08**
18 **To Daisies**	**1:35**
19 **To a Bed of Tulips**	**0:38**
20 **Arthur Bliss (1891-1975): A widow bird sate mourning (Shelley)**	**2:29**
21 **Tansy Davies (b. 1973): Oven in the underworld (Jane Taylor)**	**4:15**
22 **John Woolrich (b. 1954): No hiding place down there (Anon.)**	**1:03**
23 **John Rutter (b. 1945): For the beauty of the earth (Folliott S. Pierpoint)**	**3:20**
24 **Ronald Corp: Spring (Shakespeare)**	**1:55**
Richard Rodney Bennett: The Insect World	**6:46**
25 **The Insect World (Clare)**	**1:43**
26 **The Fly (William Oldys)**	**0:54**
27 **Glow-worms (Andrew Marvell)**	**2:06**
28 **Clock-a-clay (Clare)**	**2:02**
29 **Ronald Corp: At day-close in November (Thomas Hardy)**	**1:55**
30 **Philip Godfrey (b. 1964): Day by day (Richard of Chichester)**	**1:51**
Nicholas Maw (b. 1935): Calico Pie	**4:49**
31 **We're all in the dumps (Trad.)**	**0:59**
32 **The Cheetie Poussie-Cattie, O (Trad.)**	**1:08**
33 **Nebuchadnezzar (Trad.)**	**1:11**
34 **The goose and the gander (Trad.)**	**1:48**
35 **Did you ever (Trad.)**	**1:50**

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Encore Publications (track 30); Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd. (tracks 31-35)

Pigs Could Fly: Twentieth-Century Music for Children's Choir

Until the twentieth century very little music was written for children to sing, or perhaps rather, very little was published. Of course there were *National Song Books* featuring folk-melodies from across the British Isles and popular songs, but these were for general consumption. Stanford published a *Song Book for Schools* as early as 1884 and examples of songs for children include settings of poems by Christina Rossetti in two volumes *Kookookoorookoo* (1916) and *Kikirikee* (1925) with music by Parry, Stanford, Charles Wood and others in the first and Dyson and Howells included in the second. There were many similar songs written *for* children (verses by Robert Louis Stevenson were popular) but usually not necessarily for them to perform, although some songs and duets were published throughout the early part of the century for school singing. Publishers' catalogues of the period reflect this trend. It is only with the emergence of Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) that we find a composer writing quality music for treble voices.

Treble voices have for centuries been a feature of church and cathedral music in this country, but Britten brings children's voices to the fore in the concert hall in a series of works which include the cantata *St Nicolas* of 1948 which was composed for Lancing College in Sussex and the *Spring Symphony* of 1949. Earlier songs written specifically for school singing include *Friday Afternoons* (1935) composed for his brother's school and their singing session on the last afternoon of the school week. *A Ceremony of Carols*, composed on board ship back to England from America in 1942, has been taken up by treble voice choirs but was originally intended for female voices (Naxos 8.553133). The wonderful children's opera *Noye's Fludde* (1958) is written for child performers with the help of a few professionals and for the Vienna Boys' Choir Britten composed *The Golden Vanity* (1967), a vaudeville also first performed at Aldeburgh. For the Wandsworth School Boys' Choir he wrote the setting of Brecht's poem *Children's Crusade* for performance to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Save the Children Fund in 1969, and boys' voices also appear tellingly in the *War Requiem* (1962) and *Voices for Today* (1965).

In all cases Britten writes music in his own inimitable musical idiom, making few concessions for the young singers, but always composing music which is attractive as well as challenging. He provided the catalyst for other composers; in fact after *Noye's Fludde* there was a general cry of 'what next'? One composer who wrote a number of works including children's voices was Gordon Crosse. *Meet my Folks*, a setting of poems by Ted Hughes composed in 1964, helped launch his career. This was followed by *Demon of Adachigahara (1969)*, *History of the Flood* (1970), the nativity opera *Holly from the Bongs* (1974) and another stage work, *Potter Thompson* (1975). Other composers who wrote excellent if challenging works for children to perform include Elizabeth Maconchy (*Fly-by-nights* 1973) and there are also larger stage works such as *Julius Caesar Jones* (1966) by Malcolm Williamson, *All the King's Men* (1969) by Richard Rodney Bennett, Stephen Oliver's *The girl and the unicorn* (1978) and Karl Jenkins's *Eloise* (1997).

John Rutter has contributed a number of works for younger performers including the stage work *Bang* (1975) based on the gunpowder plot and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1981). Even more musically accessible pieces include Michael Hurd's *Jonah-man Jazz* of 1966, the first of a lively series of 'pop'-inspired works which had many imitators, one of which, *Captain Noah and His Floating Zoo* (1970) with words by Michael Flanders and music by Joseph Horovitz, has been taken up by adult and junior choirs alike.

A major composer of works for children, and the one who most readily took on the mantle of Benjamin Britten is Peter Maxwell Davies. His early days of teaching at Cirencester Grammar School encouraged him to compose music specially for his young pupils (including *O magnum mysterium* of 1960), and latterly the children of the Orkney Islands have enjoyed taking part in the *Kirkwall Shopping Songs*, the opera *Cinderella* (1980), the theatre

piece *The Rainbow* (1981), *First Ferry to Hoy* (1985) and many others.

Other composers who have written specifically for young performers include Andrew Carter, Howard Blake and Richard Blackford and today there are dozens of works being written for children to sing. The main publishing houses are producing user-friendly publications for school and youth choirs and the government is promoting singing through a project called 'Sing-up'. A host of composers and arrangers are bringing a wide variety of music to youngsters, including world music and music from the 'pop' world.

Britten's setting of the madrigal text *Now is the month of maying* (*May*) 14 was composed in 1934 and published by the Yearbook Press. Britten described it on his manuscript draft as a part-song for boys, although the piece is entirely in unison. The *Corpus Christi Carol* 13 is an offshoot from his major unaccompanied choral work *A Boy was born*, which was first performed in 1934, given its première by the Wireless Singers and the boys of St Mark's, North Audley Street. A treble voice choir sings these words and the melody, but in the context of the full work they sing over the top of the adult choir. Britten made this unison version in 1961.

A Dirge for Fidele (1922) 11 by Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) is a setting of Shakespeare's poem *Fear no more the heat o' the sun* from *Cymbeline* and was originally written for two voices (as performed here). It was published by Edwin Ashdown in a 'series of vocal duets for class singing' and the work appeared in other arrangements including a three part treble version published in 1940.

Sir Arthur Bliss (1891-1975) wrote *Three Songs for Girls' or Boys' Voices* (note the gender specific title) in 1968 and they were written for the Orpington Junior Singers. They are a disparate set with the outer two works scored for four-part unaccompanied choir and the middle song *A widow bird sate mourning* 20 scored for two (and occasionally four) voices with piano accompaniment. This is a setting of the poem by Shelley and we also hear those words (with a slight textual variant) in Richard Rodney Bennett's cycle *The Aviary* 5-9.

The Aviary (1965) is a collection of five poems about birds by Richard Rodney Bennett (b. 1936) written in a winningly singable idiom which has made this cycle and its companion, *The Insect World* 25-28 firm favourites with choirs. *The Insect World* composed in the same year is dedicated to the composer Malcolm Williamson and his wife Dolly.

John Rutter (b. 1945) and Bob Chilcott (b. 1955) have written extensively for amateur choirs and their work is immensely popular and performed widely. Rutter's *For the beauty of the earth* 23 sets the well-known words by F. S. Pierpoint (1835-1917) and was published in 1980. Bob Chilcott's *The lily and the rose*, first performed in 2003, is a setting of a haunting but elusive medieval text.

One of the composers who wrote for children at the suggestion of his publisher was Nicholas Maw (b. 1935). Two sets of nonsense poems were composed in 1976 with the titles *Calico Pie* and *Caroline Pink*. From the former we sing five songs – *We're all in the dumps*, *The Cheetie Poussie-Cattie*, *O*, *Nebuchadnezzar*, *The goose and the gander* and *Did you ever?* 31-35; the words are all traditional. The piano accompaniment for these songs is quite taxing, and these songs were written for accomplished singers.

The New London Children's Choir has always commissioned new works and recent pieces composed for the choir include another nonsense poem *No hiding place down there* (2006) 22 with music by John Woolrich (b. 1954) as well as the much more macabre poem by Jane Taylor *Oven in the underworld* (2006) 21 set to music by Tansy Davies (b. 1973).

Howard Skempton (b. 1947) has also written a piece specially for the choir, *The snare*, a setting of the poem by James Stephens composed in 1992 (not featured here). *Alice is one* 2 is a birthday song for a one-year-old composed in 1982, and *Pigs could fly* (1983) 1 is a song originally written for solo voice (and not a child); both poems have words by Skempton himself.

Choral music figures prominently in the output of John Tavener (b. 1944) but there is nothing for treble voices alone except his setting of the Lord's Prayer (*Notre père*) 10 which was written for the French choir Les Petits Chanteurs de Saint-André de Colmar on the occasion of a baptism in 1996. The setting in French moves in parallel thirds and fifths until the final *Amen*.

The New London Children's Choir gave the first performance of the *Shepherds of Hoy* 12 by Maxwell Davies (b. 1934) at Phillips, the auction house, in 1994 on an occasion when various musical manuscripts, including the manuscripts of this piece, were auctioned in aid of the Musicians' Benevolent Fund. The words are by George MacKay Brown and the piece was commissioned for Christmas 1993 by *The Times* newspaper.

Day by day 30 by Philip Godfrey (b. 1964) was written in 1996 and is a particular favourite of the New London Children's Choir. It is a setting of the prayer by St Richard of Chichester.

Over the years I have composed many works for children's voices and four works feature on this disc. *Spring* 24 is the title of Shakespeare's poem *When daises pied and violets blue* from (*Love's Labours Lost*) and *At day-close in November* (2004) 29 is a setting of a poem by Thomas Hardy which forms part of a cycle of songs to his words. Taking a lead from Richard Rodney Bennett I gathered five poems about flowers for my *Flower Songs* (1982) 15-19 but this time all of the poems are by one man, the seventeenth-century Cavalier poet Robert Herrick. *Give to my eyes, Lord* 4 is a setting of words by a clergyman friend of mine, The Rev Colin Coppen, and was published in 2007.

Ronald Corp

Alexander Wells

Photo: Michael Christie

Alexander Wells has a varied career as accompanist and chamber musician, and has been pianist of the New London Children's Choir since it was founded. His early teachers included Leonie Gombrich and Fanny Waterman, and he also had some informal composition lessons with Benjamin Britten. After taking a degree in Modern Languages at Cambridge he went on to study at the Royal College of Music with Stephen Savage and Alasdair Graham, and later trained as a répétiteur at the National Opera Studio in London. He has worked on the music staff at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, at the Glyndebourne and Wexford Festivals, and for a number of years with Almeida Opera, where he was associated with the premières of several significant new works. Previous recordings with the New London Children's Choir include *Friday Afternoons* and other children's songs by Britten (Naxos 8.553183), and a CD of songs by Betty Roe (Somm).

The New London Children's Choir

The New London Children's Choir offers a unique opportunity for children aged between seven and eighteen to learn to sing and enjoy all kinds of music. Launched by Ronald Corp in 1991 the choir has appeared in all the major London concert halls with the finest symphony orchestras and conductors and has collaborated with opera companies in Britain and abroad. The choir has made many recordings including *Star Wars* and *Hansel and Gretel*. Recently it has appeared with Lou Reed in his 'Berlin' tour. It made its début in the United States at the Lincoln Centre in 2004, and has appeared at festivals in the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Switzerland. Major performances include the Queen's Birthday Prom and the opening of the St Pancras International Eurostar station. The choir has given performances of works by Tan Dun, Andriessen, and Goehr, and has commissioned forty works from composers including Simon Bainbridge, Diana Burrell, Philip Cashian, Michael Nyman and Morgan Hayes. www.newlondonchildrenschoir.orh.uk

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Charlotte Amherst
Mary Atkinson
Evangeline Baldwin
Matthew Bannatyne
Millicent Barber
Lily Barnett
Jinny Barney
Tim Barney
Patrick Bell
Rachel Beryl
Emily Boldry
Clare Bowden
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Eleanor Brindle
Fiona Brindle
Juliana Brooke
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Eleanor Burke
Naomi Burt
Jennifer Button
Laurence Carden
Netta Chachamachu
Aamira Challenger
Janica Chavda
Iona Collins
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Emma Copley
Sarah Coppen
Catrina Daly
Jo Darnley
Michael Davin
Jessica Denford
Molly Devlin
Gabriella Diaferia
Emily Doyland
Emily Drees
Molly Duncan
Isabella Endacott
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Derryck Nasib
Allegra Nespoli
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Amaya Pitharas
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Madeleine Sinnott
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Sarah Ward
Tamara West
Zhila Lindelle White
Alma Mei Wilson
Coralie Worsley
Natasha Worsley
Clothilde Yap
Caroline Yoe
Henry Young
Sophie Young
Felix Zadek-Ewing
Poppy Zadek-Ewing

Ronald Corp

Composer, conductor and choral expert Ronald Corp founded the New London Children's Choir in 1991. He is also Artistic Director of the New London Orchestra and Musical Director of The London Chorus and Highgate Choral Society. He is a champion of new music particularly for children, and an advocate of neglected twentieth-century repertory. His compositions for children include *Cornucopia* and *Kaleidoscope* and treble voices also make an appearance in the major choral works *And all the trumpets sounded*, *Laudamus* and *Adonai Echad*. Other works include *Mary's Song*, *A New Song*, piano concerto, string quartet (The *Bustard*), given its première by the Maggini Quartet in 2008 at the Wigmore Hall, *Dover Beach*, commissioned by the BBC Singers, and *Forever Child*. His book *The Choral Singer's Companion* was recently re-published in its third edition. He also regularly leads choral workshops in the United Kingdom and abroad. His recordings include *A Ceremony of Carols* (Naxos 8.553183). www.ronaldcorp.com

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PIGS COULD FLY: Songs for Children's Choir

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While children's voices have been heard in church music for centuries, music specifically composed for young choristers is a relatively recent, and most welcome, development. As the attractive and diverse music by the fourteen composers represented on this delightful recording shows, children's choirs now have a wealth of outstanding repertoire to delight, challenge and initiate them into the world of music. Founded by Ronald Corp, the Grammy award-winning New London Children's Choir has performed in the UK, Europe and North America to critical acclaim and boasts impressive discography, including two recordings of music by Britten for Naxos (8.553183 and 8.557203).

New London Children's Choir

PIGS COULD FLY

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The New London Children's Choir • Ronald Corp

Alexander Wells, Piano

A complete track list can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the booklet

Available sung texts can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/572113.htm

Includes Free Downloadable Bonus Track available at www.classicsonline.com

Please see inside booklet for full details

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